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***From the Office of the Director of Health***

### **WIC's Breastfeeding Initiation Rates Exceed State Level**

The Springfield-Greene County Health Department's Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program is pleased to announce that in the last six months their breastfeeding initiation rate has soared to 65%, exceeding the state level of 53%.

"We attribute the higher numbers to our Breastfeeding Peer Counselor program," says senior nutritionist and program coordinator Julie Randolph, BS, IBCLC. "This is a nationwide program that is considered a 'best practice' when implemented locally. We receive funding to support two full time breastfeeding peer counselors for this program."

Peer counselors make about 500 contacts per month with pregnant women and new mothers to encourage and support breastfeeding. They teach classes, make phone calls and spend one-on-one time with moms to help them have a successful breastfeeding experience.

The Springfield-Greene County WIC program also loans breast pumps to breastfeeding moms and has one full time and two part time Internationally Board Certified Lactation Consultants on staff.

"Although breastfeeding is a natural process, it doesn't always come naturally," adds Randolph. "Yet science shows us it is the best way to feed an infant. Breastmilk has just the right amount of fat, sugar, water and protein necessary for an infant's growth and development. It is sterile and is easier for most infants to digest than formula. It contains antibodies to help protect infants from bacteria and viruses and fight off infection and disease. Breastfeeding reduces the risk of obesity and diabetes. It helps prevent breast and cervical cancer. It also helps the economy and the environment. It is a vital part of public health."

Breastfeeding peer counselor services are available at no cost to any woman, regardless of whether or not she is a WIC client. For more information, call the WIC office at (417) 864-1079.

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